

I might add one choice remark he made which was on Saturday afternoon, after the blockade course had all but been decided upon. He and I and the Attorney General, possibly one or two others, went outside on Truman's balcony outside the second floor oval room in the White House, and he remarked somewhat ruefully, "Well, I guess Homer Capchert is the Winston Churchill of our generation."

KAYSEN: Now, the next week, of course, was a period of very tense and anxious waiting in which there were a number of communications of various sorts between the President and Prime Minister Khrushchev, Chairman Khrushchev, I should say. How did the attitudes fluctuate during the course of that week? What was the first response we got from the Soviets?

SORENSEN: It was a tough one--that the Americans were taking illegal action which the Soviets would not tolerate, threatening war and so on. He made no precise commitments in that response, as I recall, that he would later have to back down from, but it was very tough, unpleasant response. But his responses seemed to fluctuate somewhat during the week also. My recollection is that it was probably the next day that he advised U Thant that he would keep Soviet ships carrying offensive weapons outside of the quarantine zone for a period, which U Thant had requested to try to settle the matter peacefully. Then perhaps the day after that would come another belligerent note, and so on. The key letter was the letter that arrived Friday night, and which, although very long and filled with some threats and rejections and so on, seemed to contain the basic elements of the final settlement: namely that any action the Soviet Union had taken (he still denied they were offensive weapons), any action they had taken was simply to defend Cuba from American invasion, and if there was not going to be an American invasion, the weapons would be withdrawn.

On Saturday while we were in the course of working out a reply to that letter, adapting it somewhat to our own language and terms to make it more precisely what we wanted in terms of inspection of the missile removal, guarantees against their reintroduction, and so on, several events happened which sent our stock plunging again. One was the downing of an American surveillance plane for the first time. The second was a public statement by Khrushchev in which he raised the ante, so to speak, and called for removal of American missile bases in Italy and Turkey as a price for the removal of

Soviet missiles. (We must come back to this missile removal question, by the way, in terms of the whole negotiating posture.) And the third was the very clear indication from our photographs that work was going ahead full speed in all the missile sites and that all the intermediate range would soon be operational. At the same time Stevenson and the Russians were meeting with U Thant at the U.N.

We decided to ignore the second Khrushchev message, to issue separate warnings about the continuation of work on the missile sites and, I believe, about the plane, and to make new plans for having fighters to stand by as our surveillance planes went over the island from then on, but not yet to take any retaliatory action for the plane knocked down, partly because we did not have sufficient information on it, and to go ahead and send a letter to Khrushchev which contained the terms of an agreement. The letter was rewritten two or three times, in which I had a hand, and I also read it over the phone to Ambassador Stevenson who expressed some optimism on the basis of his talks in New York and requested one or two changes in the letter. Then it was dispatched.

That was by far the worst day of the entire two week period because the second Khrushchev message had dimmed our hopes that our letter would be a very successful one. The shooting of the plane had raised the temperature of the whole situation. We were concerned about what action might be taken when all the missile sites became operational, and those who had originally pressed for all-out invasion were now pressing once again for stronger action and earlier action by the President. Earlier in the week, it appeared that the Russian ships were headed toward the quarantine barrier, and the President remarked that those who thought the quarantine action was the quiet, most peaceful, less violent, less dangerous action were about to be proven wrong. Fortunately, the ships turned around before they reached the barrier. I might insert here the parenthetical note that the President had said on the previous Saturday afternoon when the arguments for and against the various courses of action were presented to him, "Whichever way we go," he said, "a week or two from now, everyone will wish they had advocated some other action, because all of them are full of dangers and disadvantages."

But the meeting went on and on, all day Saturday, morning and afternoon, and once the letter had been dispatched, the real problem was what the next step was going to be. And people were terribly tired. The Secretary of State had really been in a condition of fatigue most of the week, which worried the President, and he

remarked on it to me more than once. Tempers were getting a little frayed, and finally the wisest move was made around seven o'clock or so when it was decided to adjourn the meeting for dinner. We had dinner, most of us ate in the White House, the White House mess. Vice President Johnson, Secretary Dillon, and [Donald M.] Don Wilson, the deputy director of the USIA [United States Information Agency], sat at my table. We talked entirely about other subjects. And when the meeting resumed, the feelings were not as intense, and no final decisions were made as to what steps we would take the next day, but it was fairly clear that the next day was likely to be a decisive day, either tightening the blockade by including SOL, petroleum, oil, and lubricants, or by stepping up the readiness for an invasion which had been going on all week because of the time required to prepare for an invasion, or launching an air strike, or taking some other action. On Sunday morning, Bob McNamara later told me, he woke up early, made a list of what he could recommend short of invasion. Most of us woke up Sunday morning to the news that Khrushchev had ordered the missiles withdrawn. So that our meeting that morning was not one to consider further military action, it was one of relief and exhilaration.

KAYSEN: Do you remember anything of the President's own reaction at this moment beyond the relief?

SORENSEN: Relief was certainly predominant. He was cautious. The missiles were still there. He knew the Russians had been guilty of duplicity before. He knew that a long and probably messy period of bargaining and arrangements lay ahead. He thought that any excess display of exaltation on the part of the United States might cause the Soviets to change their mind, might cause those forces or factions within the Soviet Union which had prevailed in this position to lose out to a more militant faction. In any event he was being very cautious, and he specifically warned all of us to be very cautious, and not to talk in terms of victory and make the Soviets eat crow.

KAYSEN: There was a general mood all over the world of great relief and then combined with a mood of optimism that this experience ought to make possible new understanding between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. How much did the President share, if he did at all, this latter view? What was his reaction to this view which was widely prevalent?

SORENSEN: I would say he was cautiously hopeful.

KAYSEN: One of the questions that is discussed a lot about this whole experience is what was its main significance?

Was its main significance military, was this an attempt by the Soviets to change the military balance? Was its main significance political, and was the question of the military significance of these missiles really secondary to the political significance of the Soviet act? What are your thoughts about this?

SORENSEN: My thoughts have always been that the military implications were secondary to the political implications.

There certainly were military implications, as I understand it; it was a very cheap way for them to improve their deliverable strategic striking power and to get that much closer to the United States in terms of our ballistic missile early warning system. But I think that that was not as important as the political implications, first, of the move itself and what would have happened if we had taken no action or if we had overreacted; and secondly, the political implications of the success of the American position.

Of course, there were some military implications in our success, also. The advocates of a conventional force can point to the line of naval ships and the superiority which we had on the seas, which was one of the important considerations which led us to the quarantine posture. If we were going to have a military confrontation, what better place to have it than in our own backyard, so to speak, and in an element, namely naval power, where we knew that we were superior around the world. And the advocates of greater strategic force could point out that everything we did was backed up by our determination to use our nuclear weapons.

KAYSEN: Do you think the President shared your judgment about the relative importance of the political and military factors in shaping his own decision?

SORENSEN: Yes.

KAYSEN: So that what really influenced him in the feeling that you couldn't take the no-response position, in spite of all the disadvantages that he saw in every proposal in terms of course of action, was that this was a political defeat vis-a-vis the Soviet Union which we could not accept.

SORENSEN: That's correct. It was in that context that he said on that Saturday afternoon before the decision was made that the worst thing of all would be to do nothing. And I picked up that phrase and inserted it into the speech which he gave Monday night.

KAYSEN: Did he, in the course of that discussion, or in the course of the next week and various moments of waiting, did you get any sense of his comparison of the domestic costs of various alternatives, as to what it was politically easiest for him to do, what would be most popular?

SORENSEN: He felt, that Saturday afternoon when we discussed it on the back of the porch, that the whole situation was going to be very harmful to the Democrats. He felt that it would prove that the Republicans were right in their warnings about Cuba, and that the Democrats would be accused of being soft on Communism, soft on Castro. On the other hand, they would be accused in other parts of being the war party and endangering the security of the country, and he just felt that whichever way he turned it was politically damaging at home. I don't believe, however, that was uppermost in his mind at the time.

KAYSEN: Did he ever express the view, or say anything that might have indicated the view, that direct action was politically appealing in a sense, would be the easiest course, that one should do this, national unity is always on your side?

SORENSEN: Possibly he did in connection with the other side of the coin which I mentioned, namely that a blockade was likely to be regarded as an indefinite, uncertain, prolonged situation which would only add to the frustrations of the American people and the allies.

KAYSEN: We don't want to lose the question of the missiles. Now in fact, the proposal that the U.S. should withdraw missiles from Turkey and Italy was repeated by Khrushchev, but we brushed it aside at the time. What happened in terms of the internal discussions and the thoughts within the government, and the President's own views, about these missiles, that ultimately some months later in the spring we did withdraw?

SORENSEN: During the preceding week, there had been some discussion about the fact that the Russians had obviously made a dash to compare their missiles in Cuba with our missiles in Italy and Turkey. It was thought they may put forward their request for us to withdraw. I do not believe that anyone suggested that we initiate an offer to withdraw them in exchange for a withdrawal of Soviet missiles until the meeting on Saturday, at which time Ambassador Stevenson made that proposal. He also had a proposal over the weekend, which talked in terms of the neutralization of Cuba, which meant, in effect, the withdrawal of Soviet missiles and the abandonment of Guantanamo naval base by the United States. These proposals were very vigorously denounced, particularly by McCone, Dillon, and Robert Lovett, who was present at that meeting, possibly some others.

My great objection to Stevenson's position was that he felt that he had to have a negotiating position. I not only objected to a negotiating position, but I thought his reasons were wrong: namely he felt that we would be going into the Security Council, into the United Nations, on the defensive: that we were taking a belligerent, warlike action by setting up this quarantine. I might say that the President strongly preferred the word "quarantine" to the word "blockade." And I made a point, which was later included in the speech, that on the contrary we should be taking the initiative in the United Nations. We should be not apologetic at all, but hailing the Soviets before the Security Council to explain why they had taken this action threatening peace and security, and so forth.

One of the most interesting comments made during that discussion however, was a comment made by Douglas Dillon, who had served in the Eisenhower Administration, and who said, and those are almost his exact words, "Well, everyone knows that those Jupiter missiles aren't much good anyway. We only put them in there during the previous Administration because we didn't know what else to do with them, and we really made the Turks and Italians take them." Later that afternoon, when I had gone back and was reworking the speech, the President called me on the phone and commented on Dillon's statement and wanted to know if I had jotted that down in my memoirs for the book he said that he and I were going to write about this Administration.

KAYSER: Was that the first time that the President had ever heard such a statement?

SORENSEN: Yes. So far as I know. He was quite amazed by it.

KAYSEN: Now when the negotiations in the Security Council and with the Soviets began to drag on and cease to be interesting, and when we got the photographs of ships leaving, crates on their decks, other evidences that the Soviet Union was beginning to carry out its engagements, did the President make at that time any sort of reassessment of his political evaluation of the situation, did he conclude that his earlier fear that whatever happened the Democrats would come out on the short end of it, was incorrect and that, in fact, he'd done better on it?

SORENSEN: I don't now recall any specific statements although, of course, in fact the Democrats did very, very well in the 1962 congressional election.

KAYSEN: Well, I was going to ask exactly that. In interpreting the election results did the President assign any great weight to these events?

SORENSEN: Yes. I think there was a general feeling which politicians expressed to him that the Democrats indeed were suffering in the week of the crisis, but that once the success had been achieved and the missiles withdrawn, the Democratic strength showed a great resurgence. Certainly that was true in the case of Birch, Bayn versus Coughart.

KAYSEN: The other very broad question that I think would be worth a comment is the extent to which the President's view, thoughts, feelings about the possibility of war between the United States and the Soviet Union were changed by this experience, his feelings about increasing military strength versus pursuing disarmament?

SORENSEN: Well, I think he felt we came very, very close to war that week. Once again going back to that Saturday afternoon out on the back porch, he talked about the possibilities of war resulting from whatever action we took. Then he remarked, somewhat jokingly, that there was not room in the White House bomb shelter for all of us. But I think that as much as the withdrawal of the missiles seemed to be a turning point and a demonstration that war could be avoided and an indication that the Soviets were now convinced of the wisdom of fulfilling at least a

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KAYSEN: Ted, would you say out of these various experiences-- the Cuban missile crisis, the test ban treaty, the wheat negotiations--that the President came to any conclusions about the problems of negotiating with the Russians toward the end of his Administration that were different, went beyond the thoughts he had about it when he began his term of office?

SORENSEN: Comparison would be difficult inasmuch as the President did not dwell on this or any other aspect of office in any detail before his election, following his rule of concentrating on first things first. But I would say that the following were among the principles which characterized his attitude toward negotiating with the Soviets after he had been in office for a period of time. The first was not to make any offer, or to continue to make any proposal, which irritated the Congress or the allies once it became apparent that the Soviet Union would not accept it anyway. There was no point in lowering the number of nuclear tests on-site inspections of suspicious seismic disturbances from ten to seven, for example, and incurring the wrath of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee for doing so, if it was clear that the Soviet Union would never go higher than three.

A second principle was related to that, perhaps it might be the converse of, which was to try to put forward only those proposals which we were prepared to stand behind. The President took negotiating sessions seriously, not simply as fun and games, and therefore no test ban or other disarmament proposal was put forward that the President did not feel that he and the entire government, including the military--and the Congress, with some persuasion--would be willing to stand behind.

The third was a conviction that a great deal of patience and endurance would be required. The President kept in mind a letter with respect to the Cuban missile affair which he had received from Dean Acheson in which Acheson congratulated him on his brilliant handling of the matter in its initial stages, but warned him of the long and tortuous path which could well lie ahead, comparing the situation with that which prevailed in Korea after the initial American intervention which was widely hailed in this country, but which then led to that antonism steadily eroding as no concrete resolution of the conflict appeared.

Fourth was the President's conviction that, in international affairs as in life and politics, time and events change many things which seem unchangeable, and that he could not foresee what the future would bring and did not need to make plans for

KAYSEN: What's your own judgment on that? If by good fortune, or whatever other means, we had never undertaken the operation, it had been quashed instead of executed, do you think yourself that Cuba would have died down as a political problem?

SORENSEN: No. But I don't believe that it would have been raised to quite the same intensity.

KAYSEN: But would it be your feeling that it was there and, therefore, the opposition would find it useful?

SORENSEN: I think the opposition would have talked about Cuba regardless, just as they did after the President's victory in the missile crisis, and just as he did prior to his taking office.

KAYSEN: Of course, the Bay of Pigs operation did mean in political terms that from being an Eisenhower liability, it became a Kennedy liability.

SORENSEN: Much more so, that's correct.

KAYSEN: While I want to return to this a little later, to what extent did the President view the October 22nd crisis as a natural consequence of the Bay of Pigs operation?

SORENSEN: How do you mean?

KAYSEN: Well, let me put it this way. An argument which has been made in the European press quite widely is that the Bay of Pigs events led Castro to [Nikita S.] Khrushchev very strongly for means of defense, and it was Castro's pressure on Khrushchev which, at least initially, led to the sequence of decisions which had their issue in October 1962.

SORENSEN: Well, I now see the connection, but it jumps a series of steps to which the Bay of Pigs contributed, but for which the Bay of Pigs was not solely responsible. The Bay of Pigs, as I indicated, helped intensify Cuba as a political issue in this country. Cuba, as a political

issue in this country, helped lead to a great deal of war hawk talk in the Congress and elsewhere. The war hawk talk in the Congress and elsewhere may well have helped influence Castro's plea to the Soviet Union for some bold means of defense, and that request may, in turn, have been one of the reasons that the missiles were sent to Cuba. But I think it stretches the point too far to say that the missile crisis, therefore, was the logical result of the Bay of Pigs crisis, and I never heard the President express that point of view.

KAYSEN: Well, perhaps that's the important point. Whether it was an argument which is reasonable or not, it was not an argument which figured in President Kennedy's mind to your knowledge?

SORENSEN: That's correct.

KAYSEN: Before we leave the Bay of Pigs, let's discuss a little the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs. To what extent would you say that the President's attitudes toward both his military advisors and the intelligence people for the rest of his Administration were shaped by this event?

SORENSEN: Very much so. And he said to me on at least two different occasions that had it not been for the Bay of Pigs, we would have been deeply involved in a war in Southeast Asia. And he was, therefore, glad for the experience and lesson which it had taught him.

KAYSEN: Do you want to elaborate on this for a little. Does this mean that he would have followed recommendations from the military which he thinks would have led to a war but. . . . Is that the line?

SORENSEN: I think, basically, yes. I'm just reading into that a little bit without quoting him. I think that after the Bay of Pigs, he conducted national security operations in a different way. He was more skeptical of the recommendations which came to him from the experts. He challenged their assumptions, their premises, even their facts. He made certain that everyone went on a written record of exactly where they stood so that they would be thoughtful in their

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let them get out of hand on either side and become a prelude to actual war.

KAYSEN: I think we might leave Berlin now and turn to the next great crisis, which was the Cuban missile crisis. When did you first hear about the pictures that we got which showed that there were, in fact, some long-range missiles, or intermediate range missiles?

SORENSEN: The pictures were taken on Sunday, developed on Monday, and were brought to the attention of the President first thing Tuesday morning. He called me into his office on Tuesday morning, told me that there was the first sign of such evidence, asked me to get out and check his previous statements as to what the position of the United States would be with respect to offensive weapons on the island of Cuba, and said there would be a meeting later that morning to discuss our course of action.

KAYSEN: Going back to the situation immediately before that, there had been for some time, a month or more, continuous rumor, criticism, and criticism in the Senate led by Senator [Kenneth E.] Keating saying that the Soviets were putting missiles in Cuba. What was the President's reaction to this situation?

SORENSEN: His reaction was that this was largely political talk in the middle of a congressional campaign in the fall of 1962 attempting to exploit an obvious political issue. He was having all of these reports checked out to the best of our ability. He was concerned not only by the rumors about missiles but by the statements by Senator [Homer E.] Capehart and others that we should be invading or blockading Cuba.

KAYSEN: So that while he didn't think that there was any substance in this, other than political substance, his first reaction was to say, "What is it that these fellows might be talking about? Do we have anything that bears that out?"

SORENSEN: During the earlier period?

KAYSEN: Yes.

SORENSEN: Yes, and he had made public statements as to what our position would be should any hard evidence of this kind turn up.

KAYSEN: Were these public statements mostly press conference answers which he made?

SORENSEN: No. They were mostly prepared statements. One was a White House statement, one was an opening press conference statement. Those were the two main statements. There were also press conference answers.

KAYSEN: And had there been a good deal of discussion in the White House that went on before these statements were prepared?

SORENSEN: Yes.

KAYSEN: What was the general drift of this discussion?

SORENSEN: Well, I would say the general drift was that we were concerned about the increasing Soviet shipment to Cuba and concerned about what their intentions might be there. We thought it important that this kind of public statement be made not only to reassure the Congress and the American people but also to put the Soviets and the Cubans on notice as to what the position of the United States would necessarily be. And we were concerned that as a political issue, it would get out of hand with congressional resolutions and campaign speeches.

KAYSEN: To what extent were the statements made on a reliance that the Soviets just wouldn't put these weapons into Cuba, that it didn't make any sense for them to do so, and they wouldn't do it?

SORENSEN: Well, I didn't hear that statement formally made prior to the time they were actually made, but I believe that was the working assumption of the experts. I know that it was stated by them after they were there as the reason why no one could have expected them to be there.

KAYSEN: But your best judgment would be that the President had stated to him, or had absorbed in a less direct form, the proposition that he was fairly safe from having to face such an incident?

SORENSEN: No, I don't know that, Carl.

KAYSEN: Well, let me perhaps put that question the other way around, Carl. That none of the advice he got suggested that he was likely to be facing this contingency, and that in making his statements he really was predicting his course of action for something he would have to be doing shortly.

SORENSEN: Well, I really don't know that either. I think he made these statements on the assumption that they would not have to be carried out for two reasons: one because of the unlikelihood of the Soviets' choosing such a course of action, but secondly, because the statements themselves would have a deterrent effect.

KAYSEN: Yes. But you would find it difficult to compare the sense of immediacy, let's say, involved in these statements, on the one hand, and the preparatory measures and statements made in relation to Berlin in the months after the Vienna meeting?

SORENSEN: The biggest difference was that statements on Cuba were made without consultation with the allies, and the statements on Berlin required long clearance with the allies.

KAYSEN: Well, how would that process affect the sort of attitudes and states of mind of the President's advisors? The fact that you have to talk these Berlin matters over with the Europeans all the time means that your own attitudes became more deliberate?

SORENSEN: No. It would mean that the boldness and strength of a statement is in inverse proportion to the number of people who have to clear it.

KAYSEN: But on the other hand, it's true that after Vienna we made substantial changes in our military disposition, and changes in the President's authority to deal with the size of our forces, and so on. There were no corresponding real changes in our dispositions made in the period before the hard intelligence.

SORENSEN: No, but I don't believe anyone felt they were necessary.

KAYSEN: So that in some sense this does measure a certain difference in attitude?

SORENSEN: Yes, but I think it's a great difference in situation. I think comparison is difficult here.

KAYSEN: Well, let's go back to that Tuesday morning. Later that day you totted up the previous statements, and what they showed was that the President had said that the United States would not tolerate offensive weapons in Cuba that, substantially . . .

SORENSEN: Which posed any kind of threat to the U.S. That's right.

KAYSEN: I think the major decision which came out of that meeting was to find out some more, get more intelligence?

SORENSEN: At that first meeting?

KAYSEN: Yes.

SORENSEN: Yes, the President ordered complete aerial surveillance of the island, and he called for a consideration by all present of what the alternatives were and how to proceed and, I believe, set up another meeting that same afternoon.

KAYSEN: Well, I won't try to take you through every step of this process. I'd like to ask two questions. First, I think it would be useful if you gave just a kind of general description on the course of the discussion which led finally to the decision to take naval action as the major first military step and the corresponding decision to communicate with the Soviets.

SORENSEN: You mean what were the arguments?

KAYSEN: What were the alternatives, and what were the arguments, and what were the considerations that led to this conclusion?

SORENSEN: Then you are asking me to review the whole . . .

KAYSEN: Well, I'm asking you to review it step by step and meeting by meeting. [Laughter]

SORENSEN: Well, that's an hour long answer easily. I'll try to boil it down. There were many alternatives and many courses of action open. The first one was to do nothing at all. The justification for that position was that the United States was already living under the shadow of Soviet missiles which could be launched from Soviet territory or submarines, and, therefore, there was no real change in our situation which required any kind of drastic action. The second course of action was diplomatic action only--resolutions in the O.A.S. [Organization of American States], motions in the Security Council, protests in the General Assembly, protests to the Soviet Union, and so on. Another possibility was a direct approach to the Cubans, to hold them responsible, to try to use this as an opportunity to break relations between [Fidel] Castro and the Soviet Union or between the Cuban people and Castro. Another possibility, skipping to the other end of the spectrum, was an invasion of Cuba. John McCone's phrase was to "go in and take Cuba away from Castro."

The two most popular courses were the air strike and blockade. The air strike was almost everyone's initial first choice and reaction. The ideal wished for was termed a "surgical" strike, compared to the extraction of a single bad tooth, in which a single air sortie would go in and take out these missiles with conventional bombs and be gone before the Cubans could do anything about it, and confront the Soviets with a fait accompli and a warning not to let it happen again.

There were many difficulties with that course of action. One was that it was hard to do it without giving any kind of advance warning to the Soviets and the Cubans; it would be, as the Attorney General pointed out, a Pearl Harbor in reverse and regarded by the world and by history as an attack by a leading power against a tiny nation without any warning or any effort to solve the matter without force. On the other hand, no one could devise a warning which could not lead to endless delays. It would either be termed an ultimatum, and so attacked in the councils of the world, or it could lead to counter-threats or counter-offers, or long bargaining sessions about foreign bases or American missiles abroad, one thing or another, which is

exactly what Khrushchev wanted. Having some pride in my own ability with words, I tried, I recall, to draft a message to Khrushchev which I thought could be as airtight as possible and require his immediate withdrawal of the missiles if the air strike was not to go ahead. But I had to admit on completion of that effort that even I could not make one that would stand the light of logic and history.

Another major difficulty with the so-called surgical air strike, and the real reason, the most important reason, that it was abandoned by the President, who had looked upon it with some interest initially, was that the more we examined it, the more it turned out to be neither surgical nor merely an air strike. This was because an air strike against those missiles would surely bring up Castro's planes, either to attack our planes or, believing that a war was on, to attack Florida. And, therefore, to be safe we would have to knock out his planes and his airfields. It might be that the gun emplacements opposite Guantanamo would be fired in retaliation or if their commanders felt a war was on, and, therefore, those emplacements would have to be knocked out. It might be that the COMAR torpedo boats would be launched in a retaliatory attack, and those would have to be wiped out, and so on, and on, until by the time we had taken care of every possible means of retaliation, we would have been conducting an air strike against the entire island, the island would have risen in chaos and probably rebellion, and a full-scale invasion would have been necessary anyway.

So that the more we talked, the more we liked the idea of quarantine. At first we saw more objections to the quarantine than we saw advantages. Quarantine, or a blockade, practically invited the Soviet Union to put up blockade, presumably around Berlin. So we set up a special subcommittee of our group to work on Berlin contingencies, what we would do.

I should add here that in the opinion of many, the air strike was an equally strong invitation to the Soviets to respond in kind. I will always remember Dean Acheson coming in to our meeting and saying that he felt that we should knock out Soviet missiles in Cuba by air strike. Someone asked him, "If we do that, what do you think the Soviet Union will do?" He said, "I think--I know the Soviet Union well. I know what they are required to do in the light of their history and their posture around the world. I think they will knock out our missiles in Turkey." And then the question came again, "Well, then what do we do?" "Well," he said, "I believe under our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] treaty with which I was concerned,

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consensus tending toward the blockade approach by Thursday evening, and we went over to present it to the President. Secretary Dean was not there since he was having dinner with Gromyko that night, the President having had his famous meeting with Gromyko that afternoon.

KAYSEN: Well let me backtrack a little, Ted, and say that. . .

SORENSEN: I'm nowheres near finished.

KAYSEN: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you'd come to a stopping point. Go on.

SORENSEN: McNamara had been very effective in convincing McElone to go along with that point of view. We went over to present it to the President Thursday night, and, somewhat to everyone's surprise, Mac Bundy urged that we not overlook the justification of no action at all. The President tended to favor the blockade point of view but reserved decision. On Friday morning he talked with the Joint Chiefs who were for all-out action, presumably leading to an invasion.

The President spoke to me just before he left for a campaign trip, which it had been decided he should go ahead with in order not to show any alarm or change in the normal conduct of affairs, and said that the Chiefs had very strongly expressed their point of view. He was rather concerned and hoped we would be able to get more of a consensus in his absence. We met again, therefore, on Friday morning and on Friday afternoon. We reviewed a good deal of the material we had reviewed before.

Finally, it was decided that I would draft the kind of speech which the President would give if the blockade point of view were to be the final decision. I cannot now remember whether I was also supposed to draft the other speech, or whether anyone had drafted it. I know that the justification, approach, and argumentation for the other approach was drafted by those who took it. While I opposed the all-out action and invasion as a first step, I had the same difficulties with the blockade point of view which all of us had had during the week, and I spent a good part of the afternoon tossing those around. And I came back later that afternoon not with a draft but with a series of questions about the blockade point of view. In effect, the group, by answering those questions and having those answers translated into speech form overnight, did become more persuaded of the logic and righteousness

of the blockade course. So that on Saturday morning, a majority, though not unanimous, was prepared to make that recommendation definitely to the President. The lawyers were called in to discuss the legal aspects of blockade and quarantine, and my speech draft was reviewed and rewritten, and the President was called back.

The President held a meeting over in the oval room in the mansion on Saturday afternoon, listened to presentations of both points of view, and there was some silence. And then [Roosevelt L.] Ros Gilpatric, who in my experience rarely spoke on his own in meetings of this sort, spoke up and said that he thought it was essentially a question of whether the President would start out with limited or unlimited action, and he thought it should be limited action. His was a very short and a very persuasive statement, and I believe it helped persuade the President, although that had been the point of view toward which he had been leaning all week. The President, however, did not make a final decision even then because he still wanted to satisfy himself that a surgical strike was impossible, he still saw many advantages in that. So he made the blockade decision subject to the possibility that he may still decide that the surgical strike was feasible. And he conferred with someone in the Air Force, one of the top strategic bombing generals, on Sunday morning and was convinced after that talk that the so-called surgical air strike was not feasible and could not even be certain of removing all of the missiles. There was, of course, the additional danger that some of the missiles would be operational and that their commanders would feel that war had broken out and would fire their missiles upon the United States at a tremendous loss of life. Those were essentially the elements leading up to the decision.

KAYSEN: Just to consolidate this, the decision was essentially made by Sunday morning?

SORENSEN: Right.

KAYSEN: Is it also correct that you had circulated and got back comments on a draft speech by Sunday morning, that by Sunday morning you had the material from which to start putting in final form the speech the President gave on Monday afternoon?

SORENSEN: That's right. The speech went through many drafts. It was initially drafted overnight Friday night. It was redrafted on the basis of the comments of the group Saturday morning. It was redrafted on the basis of the actual decision taken by the President Saturday afternoon, which, in effect, was a composite decision because it contained not only the blockade or quarantine element, it also contained the warning that an attack by one of these Cuban missiles would be regarded as an attack on the United States by the Soviet Union. It also contained a warning that the construction on the Soviet missiles would have to stop or that we would take further action, and implied that an air strike would be part of that action. It included diplomatic action in the United Nations as well as the OAS: it included a statement to the Cuban people that this was not aimed at them and that we wanted a free and peaceful Cuba; it included a simultaneous message to Khrushchev at the time that the President's decision was to be announced, and so on. So all of that was decided on Saturday afternoon.

I think that the State Department did a good job in working out all of the scenario that had to be followed--all of the notifying of allies and ambassadors and so on both in Washington and all around the world, the messages to be sent to Khrushchev, and briefings to be given to the NATO council and that sort of thing. The President was quite anxious to get the decision announced quite quickly because he was very much afraid that either it would leak and the American people would be somewhat panicky not knowing what our response was going to be or that the Soviets would make some kind of a grand announcement and threaten us before we had been able to take the initiative. He therefore favored a speech Sunday night. He, in fact, was amazed that it was not leaked out earlier. He considered it the best kept secret in government.

I had kidded him about that earlier on Wednesday night. The Attorney General and I had met him at the airport when he had returned from a campaign trip to Connecticut, brought him up to date on the discussions that afternoon, and advised that he let us meet on our own for a while so that Thompson, Bohlen, [Edwin M.] Ed Martin and others could speak their minds more freely, as they did when the President was absent. And when he returned then on the amazing tightrope, I said very casually as he was getting out of the car, "That's right. We don't know of any leak at all other than your conversation with Mr. Alsop," which he for a moment, took very seriously and denied very vehemently. At any rate the reason why the speech was not given Sunday night was

the difficulty of communicating with the foreign heads of state on a Sunday when all of them were at their villas in the country, and unwilling to see our ambassadors.

KAYSEN: Didn't have the benefit of the White House signal service.

SORENSEN: That's right.

KAYSEN: I think you've explained the timing point which is certainly a very important point. I think another point worth comment is: the people chosen to convene to ask for advice, and when and how he decided to select the particular group he selected, what later got the designation of the Executive Committee of the NSC [National Security Council]. What can you say about that?

SORENSEN: Why he selected that particular group?

KAYSEN: Yes.

SORENSEN: I think he selected this group on two bases. First, those people who had some official responsibility in this area. Secondly, it was those people in whose basic judgment he had some confidence. I don't mean to imply there was not a considerable overlap in those two groups.

KAYSEN: Yes. Well, would that, for instance, be the explanation for having the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury in the group, neither of whom was directly responsible, in the sense that the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State would?

SORENSEN: That's right. He had confidence in their judgment. He wanted to have their participation and, of course, had been inviting them and relying on them in the National Security Council meetings.

KAYSEN: Would there be anybody else that you would select as being especially in this category rather than in the official responsibility category?

SORENSEN: Me? [Laughter]

KAYSEN: Now in the question of various views. Was there a fair consistency of views throughout the discussion or did everybody shift his view back and forth a good deal, or . . .

SORENSEN: There was a good deal of shifting back and forth. Probably everyone there changed his view at least once during that week.

KAYSEN: Was there anybody who consistently took a no action position, or did that fall by the wayside fairly quickly?

SORENSEN: Not that I know of. I have a vague impression that in the Friday morning meeting that the President had with the Chiefs, General Shoup had said that he saw no cause for alarm, that this was simply living under missiles and we'd been living under missiles before and no action was required. On Wednesday morning the President received a note from Ambassador [Adlai E.] Stevenson which did not come out clearly against taking action but pointed out all the arguments against it, all the dangers, all the hazards, all the reasons for negotiation. He did not advocate action and concluded by saying, as I recall, if action

is necessary, we should also make clear our negotiating positions. I do not know that you would call that a no-action, a firm no-action, recommendation.

KAYSEN: And Ambassador Stevenson was not at the meetings?

SORENSEN: He was at the meetings Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, I believe, but not before that.

KAYSEN: How about Dean Acheson? Was he at the meetings consistently?

SORENSEN: No, he was at some of the meetings. I recall him at the Friday meeting and one earlier.

KAYSEN: So that it's fair to say, among other things, that there's never been any even moderately accurate published report of what had gone on at these meetings?

SORENSEN: That is correct.

KAYSEN: Was there ever any other military operation considered beside the air strike and a full-scale invasion?

SORENSEN: There were at least two others which came to my mind. One was to have an air drop of men who would then take out the missile base. That was abandoned by the military as being uncertain and impracticable. The other was a suggestion by Walt Rostow that we look into the possibility of some kind of pellets, rather than bombs, which would completely foul up the missile works but would not result in any deaths to either Russians or Cubans. I neglected to mention that killing of Russians or Cubans was one of the considerations against the air strike.

KAYSEN: What happened to that suggestion?

SORENSEN: Well, apparently that wasn't feasible either because I recall raising it daily with the Defense Department and never getting a very satisfactory reply, and I assumed they were looking into it.